

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
HOUSTON DIVISION**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

**MARIBEL SANTANA-CERANO,
Defendant.**

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CRIMINAL NO. H-19-488-S1-01

PLEA AGREEMENT

The United States of America, by and through Jennifer B. Lowery, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Texas, and Steven Schammel, Assistant United States Attorney, and the defendant, MARIBEL SANTANA-CERANO (“Defendant”), and Defendant’s counsel, pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(A) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, state that they have entered into an agreement, the terms and conditions of which are as follows:

Defendant’s Agreement

1. Defendant agrees to plead guilty to Count 3 of the Superseding Indictment. Count 3 charges Defendant with making a false statement in connection with the purchase of a firearms, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 922(a)(6) and 924(a)(2). Defendant, by entering this plea, agrees that he/she is waiving any right to have the facts that the law makes essential to the punishment either charged in the indictment, or proved to a jury or proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Punishment Range

2. The **statutory** maximum penalty for each violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 922(a)(6) and 924(a)(2), is imprisonment of not more than 10 years and a fine of not more than \$250,000. Additionally, Defendant may receive a term of supervised release after imprisonment of up to 3 years. See Title 18, United States Code, sections 3559(a)(3) and

3583(b)(2). Defendant acknowledges and understands that if he/she should violate the conditions of any period of supervised release which may be imposed as part of his/her sentence, then Defendant may be imprisoned for the entire term of supervised release, without credit for time already served on the term of supervised release prior to such violation. *See* Title 18, United States Code, sections 3559(a)(3) and 3583(e)(3). Defendant understands that he/she cannot have the imposition or execution of the sentence suspended, nor is he/she eligible for parole.

Mandatory Special Assessment

3. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, section 3013(a)(2)(A), immediately after sentencing, Defendant will pay to the Clerk of the United States District Court a special assessment in the amount of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) per count of conviction. The payment will be by cashier's check or money order, payable to the Clerk of the United States District Court, c/o District Clerk's Office, P.O. Box 61010, Houston, Texas 77208, Attention: Finance.

Immigration Consequences

4. Defendant recognizes that pleading guilty may have consequences with respect to his/her immigration status if he/she is not a citizen of the United States. Defendant understands that if he/she is not a citizen of the United States, by pleading guilty he/she may be removed from the United States, denied citizenship, and denied admission to the United States in the future. Defendant's attorney has advised Defendant of the potential immigration consequences resulting from Defendant's plea of guilty.

Waiver of Appeal and Collateral Review

5. Defendant is aware that Title 28, United States Code, section 1291, and Title 18, United States Code, section 3742, afford a defendant the right to appeal the conviction and sentence

imposed. Defendant is also aware that Title 28, United States Code, section 2255, affords the right to contest or “collaterally attack” a conviction or sentence after the judgment of conviction and sentence has become final. Defendant knowingly and voluntarily waives the right to appeal or “collaterally attack” the conviction and sentence, except that Defendant does not waive the right to raise a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel on direct appeal, if otherwise permitted, or on collateral review in a motion under Title 28, United States Code, section 2255. In the event Defendant files a notice of appeal following the imposition of the sentence or later collaterally attacks his conviction or sentence, the United States will assert its rights under this agreement and seek specific performance of these waivers.

6. In agreeing to these waivers, Defendant is aware that a sentence has not yet been determined by the Court. Defendant is also aware that any estimate of the possible sentencing range under the sentencing guidelines that he/she may have received from his/her counsel, the United States or the Probation Office, is a prediction and not a promise, did not induce his/her guilty plea, and is not binding on the United States, the Probation Office or the Court. The United States does not make any promise or representation concerning what sentence the defendant will receive. Defendant further understands and agrees that the United States Sentencing Guidelines are “effectively advisory” to the Court. *See United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005). Accordingly, Defendant understands that, although the Court must consult the Sentencing Guidelines and must take them into account when sentencing Defendant, the Court is not bound to follow the Sentencing Guidelines nor sentence Defendant within the calculated guideline range.

7. Defendant understands and agrees that each and all waivers contained in the Agreement are made in exchange for the concessions made by the United States in this plea agreement.

The United States' Agreements

8. The United States agrees to each of the following:

- (a) If Defendant pleads guilty to Count 3 of the indictment and persists in that plea through sentencing, and if the Court accepts this plea agreement, the United States will move to dismiss any remaining counts of the indictment at the time of sentencing;
- (b) If the Court determines that Defendant qualifies for an adjustment under section 3E1.1(a) of the United States Sentencing Guidelines, and the offense level prior to operation of section 3E1.1(a) is 16 or greater, the United States will move under section 3E1.1(b) for an additional one-level reduction because Defendant timely notified authorities of his or her intent to plead guilty, thereby permitting the United States to avoid preparing for trial and permitting the United States and the Court to allocate their resources more efficiently.

United States' Non-Waiver of Appeal

9. The United States reserves the right to carry out its responsibilities under guidelines sentencing. Specifically, the United States reserves the right:

- (a) to bring its version of the facts of this case, including its evidence file and any investigative files, to the attention of the Probation Office in connection with that office's preparation of a presentence report;
- (b) to set forth or dispute sentencing factors or facts material to sentencing;
- (c) to seek resolution of such factors or facts in conference with Defendant's counsel and the Probation Office;
- (d) to file a pleading relating to these issues, in accordance with section 6A1.2 of the United States Sentencing Guidelines and Title 18, United States Code, section 3553(a); and
- (e) to appeal the sentence imposed or the manner in which it was determined.

Sentence Determination

10. Defendant is aware that the sentence will be imposed after consideration of the United States Sentencing Guidelines and Policy Statements, which are only advisory, as well as the

provisions of Title 18, United States Code, Section 3553(a). Defendant nonetheless acknowledges and agrees that the Court has authority to impose any sentence up to and including the statutory maximum set for the offense(s) to which Defendant pleads guilty, and that the sentence to be imposed is within the sole discretion of the sentencing judge after the Court has consulted the applicable Sentencing Guidelines. Defendant understands and agrees that the parties' positions regarding the application of the Sentencing Guidelines do not bind the Court and that the sentence imposed is within the discretion of the sentencing judge. If the Court should impose any sentence up to the maximum established by statute, or should the Court order any or all of the sentences imposed to run consecutively, Defendant cannot, for that reason alone, withdraw a guilty plea, and will remain bound to fulfill all of the obligations under this plea agreement.

Rights at Trial

11. Defendant understands that by entering into this agreement, he/she surrenders certain rights as provided in this plea agreement. Defendant understands that the rights of a defendant include the following:

(a) If Defendant persisted in a plea of not guilty to the charges, defendant would have the right to a speedy jury trial with the assistance of counsel. The trial may be conducted by a judge sitting without a jury if Defendant, the United States, and the court all agree.

(b) At a trial, the United States would be required to present witnesses and other evidence against Defendant. Defendant would have the opportunity to confront those witnesses and his/her attorney would be allowed to cross-examine them. In turn, Defendant could, but would not be required to, present witnesses and other evidence on his/her own behalf. If the witnesses for Defendant would not appear voluntarily, he/she could require their attendance through the subpoena power of the court; and

(c) At a trial, Defendant could rely on a privilege against self-incrimination and decline to testify, and no inference of guilt could be drawn from such refusal to testify. However, if Defendant desired to do so, he/she could testify on his/her own behalf.

Factual Basis for Guilty Plea

12. Defendant is pleading guilty because he/she is in fact guilty of the charges contained in Count 3 of the indictment. If this case were to proceed to trial, the United States could prove each element of the offense beyond a reasonable doubt. The following facts, among others would be offered to establish Defendant's guilt:

On or about May 19, 2018 **Maribel Santana-Cerano**, knowingly made and willfully caused to be made a false and fictitious written statement to Carter's Shooting Center, Inc. Carter's Country #2, of Katy, Texas, a federally licensed firearms dealer. Said statement was intended and likely to deceive dealer, as to a fact material to the lawfulness of such sale of the said firearms namely: a Ruger, model AR-556, 5.56 mm rifle with a 30 round magazine and a Ruger, model LCP, .380 caliber pistol, in that **Maribel Santana-Cerano** falsely represented on the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) form 4473 that she was the actual buyer of the aforementioned firearms when in truth and in fact the defendant knew that those statements and representations were false and those firearms were being purchased for another unknown individual and were being transported into Mexico for that person.

On July 31, 2018, at approximately 3:00 a.m. a bus from Pegasso Bus Tours arrived in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, carrying 21 adult and 2 minor passengers. The bus originated in Houston, Texas and was destined for Monterrey, Nuevo Leon,

Mexico. The bus entered Mexico through the Reynosa-Hidalgo Port of Entry. Government of Mexico Officials x-rayed the luggage and discovered a black bag containing 34 pistols and 31 magazines. No one claimed ownership of the bag. **Maribel Santana-Cerano** was a passenger on that bus and was identified as a potential owner based upon the fact that she demonstrated suspicious behavior and government of Mexico agents found numerous returns for multiple sales reports in E-trace. Follow up interviews of the by agent of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were conducted at the Pegasso Bus terminal in Houston. An employee there stated that **Maribel Santana-Cerano** had a black bag with her prior to departure, although he could not identify that bag specifically. **Maribel Santana-Cerano** continued into Mexico.

Houston Agents followed up on the multiple sales reports for **Maribel Santana-Cerano** at Guns Unlimited, a federally licensed firearms dealer in Katy, Texas. Agents retrieved ATF forms 4473 from this federally licensed firearms dealer completed by Defendant **Maribel Santana-Cerano**. Agents continued to follow up on the firearms that had been seized in Mexico and retrieved the 4473s from Carter's Country #2. Agents interviewed **Maribel Santana-Cerano** at the airport upon her return to the United States from Mexico and she admitted to purchasing firearms for an individual in Mexico and that she had used her sister Ariceli Santana to straw purchase additional firearms. **Maribel Santana-Cerano** admitted that she would then store and accumulate the firearms at her residence before their transport into Mexico. She stated that she was surprised that it was

only 34 firearms in the bus, since the total number was 82.⁹ She further stated that other members of the organization had provided her with money for the various firearms purchases.

Breach of Plea Agreement

13. If Defendant should fail in any way to fulfill completely all of the obligations under this plea agreement, the United States will be released from its obligations under the plea agreement, and Defendant's plea and sentence will stand. If at any time Defendant retains, conceals, or disposes of assets in violation of this plea agreement, or if Defendant knowingly withholds evidence or is otherwise not completely truthful with the United States, then the United States may move the Court to set aside the guilty plea and reinstate prosecution. Any information and documents that have been disclosed by Defendant, whether prior to or subsequent to this plea agreement, and all leads derived therefrom, will be used against defendant in any prosecution.

Restitution, Forfeiture, and Fines – Generally

14. This Plea Agreement is being entered into by the United States on the basis of Defendant's express representation that he/she will make a full and complete disclosure of all assets over which he/she exercises direct or indirect control, or in which he/she has any financial interest. Defendant agrees not to dispose of any assets or take any action that would effect a transfer of property in which he/she has an interest, unless Defendant obtains the prior written permission of the United States.

15. Defendant agrees to make complete financial disclosure by truthfully executing a sworn financial statement (Form OBD-500 or similar form) within 14 days of signing this plea agreement. Defendant agrees to authorize the release of all financial information requested by

the United States, including, but not limited to, executing authorization forms permitting the United States to obtain tax information, bank account records, credit histories, and social security information. Defendant agrees to discuss and answer any questions by the United States relating to Defendant's complete financial disclosure.

16. Defendant agrees to take all steps necessary to pass clear title to forfeitable assets to the United States and to assist fully in the collection of restitution and fines, including, but not limited to, surrendering title, executing a warranty deed, signing a consent decree, stipulating to facts regarding the transfer of title and the basis for the forfeiture, and signing any other documents necessary to effectuate such transfer. Defendant also agrees to direct any banks which have custody of his/her assets to deliver all funds and records of such assets to the United States.

17. Defendant understands that forfeiture, restitution, and fines are separate components of sentencing and are separate obligations.

Fines

18. Defendant understands that under the Sentencing Guidelines the Court is permitted to order Defendant to pay a fine that is sufficient to reimburse the government for the costs of any imprisonment or term of supervised release, if any. Defendant agrees that any fine imposed by the Court will be due and payable immediately, and Defendant will not attempt to avoid or delay payment. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 7 above, Defendant waives the right to challenge the fine in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding.

Complete Agreement

19. This written plea agreement, consisting of 11 pages, including the attached addendum of Defendant and his/her attorney, constitutes the complete plea agreement between the United

States, Defendant, and Defendant's counsel. No promises or representations have been made by the United States except as set forth in writing in this plea agreement. Defendant acknowledges that no threats have been made against him/her and that he/she is pleading guilty freely and voluntarily because he/she is guilty.

20. Any modification of this plea agreement must be in writing and signed by all parties.

Filed at Houston, Texas, on March 29, 2021.


Defendant

Subscribed and sworn to before me on March 29, 2021.

NATHAN OCHSNER, CLERK
UNITED STATES DISTRICT CLERK

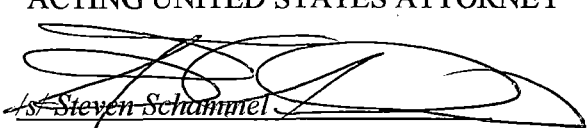
By:


Deputy United States District Clerk

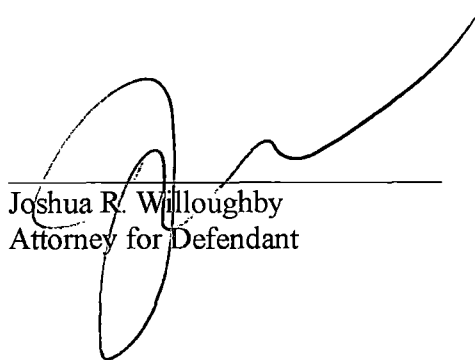
APPROVED:

JENNIFER B. LOWERY
ACTING UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

By:


~~/s/ Steven Schammel~~

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Joshua R. Willoughby
Attorney for Defendant

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
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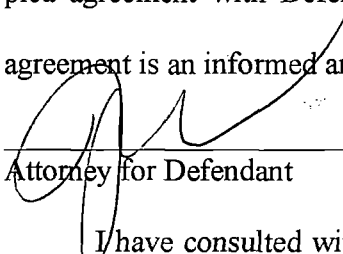
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CRIMINAL NO. H-19-488-S1-01

PLEA AGREEMENT -- ADDENDUM

I have fully explained to Defendant his/her rights with respect to the pending indictment. I have reviewed the provisions of the United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines Manual and Policy Statements and I have fully and carefully explained to Defendant the provisions of those Guidelines which may apply in this case. I have also explained to Defendant that the Sentencing Guidelines are only advisory and the court may sentence Defendant up to the maximum allowed by statute per count of conviction. Further, I have carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with Defendant. To my knowledge, Defendant's decision to enter into this agreement is an informed and voluntary one.



Attorney for Defendant



Date

I have consulted with my attorney and fully understand all my rights with respect to the indictment pending against me. My attorney has fully explained, and I understand, all my rights with respect to the provisions of the United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines Manual which may apply in my case. I have read and carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with my attorney. I understand this agreement and I voluntarily agree to its terms.



Defendant



Date